Pride is Power

Craig Washington

Pride! In The Life Atlanta appreciates the value of this "deeper love" and how crucial it is to our wellness as African-descended men and women "in the life." The events we've scheduled from the Kick Off Reception through the Family Reunion Picnic were planned to enhance a greater love of self and a stronger sense of unity within our special community. We are honored to lend our talents to enrich the celebration of Atlanta's official black gay/les/bi trans holiday.

Let me point out that ITLA is by no means a pioneer effort. Our way has been paved by people like Duncan Teague, Venus Landin, Tre Johnson, Charlene Cothran, Derrick Bell; organizations like ALGA (now defunct), AESM, Boyz of Distinction and CPA who have labored to present social/educational functions for a community starving for self-acceptance. We salute our beloved first-string soldiers who carried on before there was a Second Sunday or Zami, those who rallied and organized and typed editorials and those who gave the best card parties and those who simply lived their lives with honesty and encouraged others to do the same. ITLA is indebted to all of you.

The state of being proud, the act of celebrating one's gayness is not easy for many of us to realize. We are very much like distant cousins in the larger African-descended clan whose kinship may be threatened or even severed. The love of our biological families is often conditional, to be bartered at the high price of false conformity (playing straight) or tacit compliance (don't ask - don't tell). We maintain a precipitous balance between being accepted and affirming our identities on the job, at the holiday dinner table, and on the street. To summarily define one's sexual orientation as "what I do in my bedroom" is to deny how that primary aspect influences our lives far beyond the literal sexual act. The daily onslaughts we endure as gays, lesbians, bis and trans parallel the racism, sexisms and other ugly isms we face simultaneously. It has distorted our self-image and diminished our compassion for each other. Many times we mimic our oppressors and shun brothers who aren't butch enough, or sisters who are diesel dykes, or transgendered persons whose worth begins and ends on a stage. This state of confusion must be worked through so that we may be healed and whole. As Audre Lorde once stated, "You cannot dismantle the master's house by using the master's tools!"

Atlanta is a typical Southern hotbed of tradition and contradiction. The Church is the dominant institution of local culture and, as such, it enforces homophobic, erotophobic, misogynist interpretations of Christian doctrine come high noon every Sunday. As "errant" members of this culture we hop into Loretta's and The Other Side stomp-and-get-happy, get up come Sunday, attend service where we are called out as abominations, and still stomp-and-get-happy then return home to our roommates, lovers, friends, etc. We enjoy subversive moments but otherwise conform to traditions that won't yield room for our true selves to thrive. The challenge is great. We must ask ourselves are we up to the task at hand.

We now stand at a pivotal point in time. We have more organizations and resources developed by and for us than ever before including our Own church (Unity Fellowship). We have a People of Color contingent in the Gay Pride parade. We rallied openly to protest the Black Church bombings (our love endures collective abuse.) We have written plays about women loving women and a man living with AIDS. We have the support of icons like Coretta Scott King and Rep. John Lewis and powerhouse friends like Rep. Cynthia McKinney. Black gay culture in Atlanta is getting "phatter" every year. And to ensure our continued growth, we need your time, your energy, your dollars, and your prayers. You don't have to wear a pink triangle to join the struggle. You can send a check to Zami, or volunteer with Venus Magazine, or join us at ITLA, or pray for the greater joy and health of your "Family" or all of the above. Whatever you can do, just pick that, do it and do it well. Do it with pride. It's the power that gives you the strength to survive.